

House Republican Press Release

September 16, 2005
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Governor Announces Toll-Free Hot Line for Consumer Complaints about Gas Pricing



Motorists Can Voice Concerns to Department of Consumer Protection

Governor M. Jodi Rell today announced the start of a toll-free hot line for residents to report suspected unfair pricing of gasoline at local retailers. The Gas Price Hot Line will be answered by the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and by voicemail during off-hours. The hot line number is (800) 842-2649.

"The recent spiral in gas prices has stunned us all - and it is having the biggest impact on low- and middle-income families in Connecticut," the Governor said. "I share the shock motorists feel every time they pull up to the pump. Though ongoing discussions with gasoline retailers and our review of the situation indicate that little, if any, unfair pricing activity is taking place locally, we want to take this extra step to encourage consumers to report suspicious activity. If we see any abnormal pricing, we will investigate it."

For the convenience of consumers, DCP has also set up a special "gas price monitoring voice mailbox," attached to the hot line, where consumers can leave a message during non-business hours. DCP will return the call the next day.

DCP has been actively monitoring prices around the state, but the hot line will provide additional information to help ensure a fair marketplace, Consumer Protection Commissioner Edwin R. Rodriguez said.

"We will certainly be reviewing the data to determine if any stations are charging more than what's reasonable under current market conditions," Commissioner Rodriguez said.

Gas prices across the state hovered around \$3.15 for a gallon of unleaded regular as the week began. However, Rodriguez said, differences among the contracts that retailers have with their suppliers could force some stations' prices somewhat higher.

"A higher price doesn't automatically mean that the retailer is taking advantage of his customers; it often indicates that his delivery contract with his wholesaler is more stringent than some of his competitors," Rodriguez said. "For example, some retailers' contracts require them to prepay for a set minimum number of gallons or risk default."

Nevertheless, Commissioner Rodriguez encourages consumers who see large price discrepancies to call and report them to the hot line. Callers should indicate the name of the gas station, its street address, town, and the station's posted prices.

"I am confident we will get through this, and I know that the vast majority of gasoline retailers are squeezed by market forces that are largely outside their control," Governor Rell said. "However, I want to warn anyone who would try to use this situation for personal gain that I will not stand for it. Price-gouging, if it happens, will be identified, stopped and prosecuted."